

3 FAH-2 H-420 THE FOREIGN SERVICE NATIONAL POSITION CLASSIFICATION PLAN

3 FAH-2 H-421 TITLE

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“The Foreign Service National Position Classification Plan” is the term used to designate all of the position classification standards, instructions, controls, procedures, and aids which are used in classifying positions incumbent by FSN employees of the Department of State and associated agencies.

3 FAH-2 H-422 STATUTORY BASIS

The statutory basis of the Foreign Service National Position Classification Plan is contained in the Foreign Service Act of 1980 (Public Law 465, 95th Congress), as amended. Section 408(a)(1) of that Act provides, “The Secretary shall establish compensation (including position classification) plans for foreign national employees of the Service, and for United States citizens employed in the Service abroad who are family members of Government Employees.”

The referenced sections of the Foreign Service Act of 1980, as amended, provides the Department of State and each associated agency authority to classify foreign national positions. Hence, the legal basis for the Plan is the Foreign Service Act and the authority exercised thereunder by the Department of State and the associated agencies.

3 FAH-2 H-423 COVERAGE

The Plan applies to all Department of State and associated agency foreign national positions at overseas establishments. Foreign national employees include both citizens of the host country and citizens of other countries.

3 FAH-2 H-424 STRUCTURE AND NATURE

3 FAH-2 H-424.1 Structure

The Plan utilizes a structure of twelve grades to encompass all levels of white collar and manual local positions found in embassies, consulates general, consulates, special posts, and associated agency missions and

offices. Grades are numbered from 1 to 12, in ascending order. Grades 12, 11, and 10 are for high level professional positions, including physicians, attorneys, engineers, political, economic, information specialists, etc., and other highly qualified professionals. A few top level administrative and technical management positions are also appropriate to these grades. Grades 9, 8, and 7 are for technical and administrative management positions. Grades 6, 5, and 4 are for upper level clerical and supervisory clerical positions and for journeyman skilled mechanic and supervisory manual positions. Grades 3, 2, and 1 are for entry and lower level clerical and manual positions.

The twelve grade structure provides for appropriate classification and compensation of all FSN positions from unskilled jobs to the most highly qualified professional positions encountered at the largest, most sophisticated overseas establishments of the Department of State and associated agencies. This does not mean that all overseas establishments will use all twelve grades; differences in size, functions performed, relative complexity and importance of programs, organization of work, contracting practices, and other variable factors will govern the actual number of grades used at specific establishments. For example, a large establishment might have no positions that warranted allocation to Grades 11 or 12, and might also contract out janitor, gardener, and other work that warranted allocation at Grade 1 and 2. Such an establishment would use only the middle eight grades of the structure, i.e., Grades 3 through 10. In general, large establishments will tend to use eight or fewer grades, but many variables other than size will affect the number of grades an establishment uses. The classification plans of overseas establishments will include only those grades in which positions are classified, and the grades used will be numbered in accordance with the Interagency Foreign Service National Position Classification Plan structure.

In a few countries, differences in social legislation entitlements and fringe benefit treatment between white collar and manual workers may result in substantial distortions if the two types of positions are placed in an integrated classification plan, as described above. In such cases, separate white collar and manual compensation plans of twelve white collar and six manual grades are appropriate but agency level headquarters office approval is required. Requests for separate compensation plans must provide specific and detailed information on how and why an integrated compensation plan would cause pay distortions.

3 FAH-2 H-424.2 Nature

Unlike the Foreign Service American Plan, which is a “rank in the person” system, the Foreign Service National Position Classification Plan is a “rank in the position” system. The **only** basis for classifying an FSN position are the duties and responsibilities of the position and the qualifications required. Length of service in the position, quality of performance, and similar personal factors have no bearing on the classification of the position.

Foreign Service National positions are placed in classes on the basis of their duties and responsibilities and required qualifications, as identified and prescribed by Interagency Foreign Service National Position Classification Standards, or where no standards cover the duties of the position, on the basis of the General Grade Level Guides and the guidance provided by the most nearly applicable standards.

3 FAH-2 H-425 RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CLASSIFICATION AND COMPENSATION

3 FAH-2 H-425.1 Distinction Between Classification and Compensation Plans

The Foreign Service National Position Classification Plan provides the structure, classification standards, guidance and procedures for classifying positions to their proper classes, i.e., titles and grades. Post compensation plans, developed from survey data on prevailing salary and pay practices, provide salary rates for grades prescribed by the classification plan. The compensation plan also contains supplementary provisions relating to fringe benefits based on prevailing practices, and instruction on the administration of the total compensation plan.

3 FAH-2 H-425.2 Compliance With Position Classification Standards is Mandatory

All foreign national positions must be classified in accordance with the Interagency Foreign Service National Position Classification Standards, including the grade limitations contained therein. These standards shall also be used as guidance in classifying positions which are not covered by directly applicable standards. Each position will be assigned to the class indicated to be proper for its duties, responsibilities, and required qualifications, and will be paid rates for that grade arrived at in accordance with the exception rate range determination procedures contained in the subchapter 3 FAH-2 H-240 of Chapter 2 (Foreign Service National Compensation) of the Foreign Service National Handbook (3 FAH-2). It is recognized that the application of classification standards to many positions will require the exercise of judgment; however, some kinds and levels of work are so precisely defined by classification standards that there is little room for the exercise of judgment. There is no authority for any official of the Department of State or an associated agency to classify or direct the classification of a position to a grade higher than the grade clearly indicated to be proper by directly applicable classification standards. Personnel Officers should record the full details of actions which are not in accordance with the above, and attach these comments to the position description.

3 FAH-2 H-425.3 Classification Not to be Used As a Tool to Solve Pay Problems

Failure to recognize the distinctions between classification and compensation can often result in requests to classify positions improperly to solve a pay problem. The basic principles of both classification and compensation administration require that classification problems be solved within the framework of the classification plan, and that pay problems be solved within the framework of the compensation plan. Placing a position in a grade that is higher or lower than appropriate for budget purposes, to suit the present or a future incumbent of the position, to obtain a promotion, to reward an employee for long service, loyalty, or quality of work, or because prevailing rates are higher than those of the proper class is unsound and a violation of these instructions.

3 FAH-2 H-425.4 Recruitment and Retention Problems

In a few situations in which prevailing rates are higher than the rates for the appropriate grade of the position provided by the post compensation plan, recruitment and retention difficulties may develop. If there are indications that such a situation is developing, intensive and imaginative recruitment efforts should be made, and comprehensive exit interviews should be conducted to determine if pay or nonpay reasons are the real cause of resignations. Most recruitment and retention problems can be substantially reduced through imaginative recruiting efforts, use of the authority to employ new hires at steps above the minimum provided by 3 FAM 924.3, and sustained effort to resolve nonpay related problems which cause resignations. Where none of these techniques reduce recruitment and retention problems to acceptable limits, consideration should be given to requesting authorization of an exception rate range.

3 FAH-2 H-425.5 Exception Rates

An exception rate is defined as a rate range, jointly authorized by the agency headquarters offices of the Department of State and associated agencies concerned, for a class of positions that is higher than the rates for that grade authorized by the post compensation plan. Exception rates are authorized **only** to provide solutions for actual, demonstrated, and substantial recruitment and retention problems that can be solved by the higher rates. Requests for exception rates must be accompanied by hard evidence concerning the actual number of attempted but unsuccessful recruitments, and the number of actual resignations over a specific period of time. Requests for exception rates may not be justified on the basis of employee morale problems related to pay. Instructions for preparing requests for exception rates are contained in subchapter 3 FAH-2 H-240 of Chapter 2 (Foreign Service National Compensation) of the Foreign Service National Handbook (3 FAH-2).

3 FAH-2 H-426 THROUGH H-429 UNASSIGNED